

PROPOSAL TO SUPPRESS *PYTHON TIMORENSIS* MÜLLER, 1844,
AND *PYTHON TIMORIENSIS* MÜLLER, 1857, AND TO ADD
PYTHON TIMORIENSIS (PETERS, 1876) TO THE OFFICIAL LIST
(REPTILIA, SERPENTES, BOIDAE). Z.N.(S.) 1834

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The present note deals with the names of two species of Boid snakes from the Lesser Sunda Islands. This matter has been briefly discussed already by me in an earlier paper (Brongersma, 1956 : 290-192), but to allow the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature to take action, it is discussed more completely in the present note.

Python timorensis Müller, 1844

2. In September 1829, during a journey into the interior of Timor, S. Müller and H. C. Macklot obtained a Boid snake (Müller, 1844 : 211; 1857 : 172). The same species was also obtained by them on the island of Samao (off the western tip of Timor) as is shown by specimens in the collection of the Leiden Museum, and as was mentioned by Schlegel (1837, ii : 420).

3. The first printed information about this snake was published by Schlegel (1837), who considered it a variety of *Python amethystinus*, and who refers to it three times. Schlegel (1837, i : 178) states that the islands of Timor, Samao, and New Ireland harbour a python that is wholly like *Python amethystinus* (i.e., *Liasis amethystinus* (Schneider, 1801)) of the island of Saparua (off Amboina, Moluccas), but with the characters less strongly marked. Schlegel (1837, i : 242) writes that the python from Timor perhaps is different from that of Amboina (recte: from that of Saparua). In his account of *Python amethystinus*, and after having described a specimen from Saparua, Schlegel (1837, ii : 420) states that Lesson, Macklot and Müller have discovered a python in New Ireland, Timor, and Samao, which resembles the specimen from Amboina (recte: Saparua) in nearly all aspects, but which differs nevertheless from the last-named in several features. He adds that these travellers (and from the context it is clear that he means Macklot and Müller) did send four specimens to the Leiden Museum and that Lesson sent a specimen to the Paris Museum. He continues by enumerating the features in which the specimens from Timor differ from the Saparua specimen. Although Schlegel (1837, ii : 420) speaks in this connection about "ceux de Timor" (those from Timor) it is evident that he also included the specimens from Samao and even that of New Ireland in his remarks, for in a note to the enumeration of characters he states that "Un de nos sujets" (one of our specimens) has two preoculars and two rows of loreals, a feature not found in the specimens from Timor and Samao available to Schlegel, but which he must have observed in the New Ireland specimen.

4. Of the four specimens collected by Müller and Macklot, three are still in the collections of the Leiden Museum (RMNH 1232, Timor; 1230, 1231, Samao). The fourth specimen was sent to the Paris Museum (MNHN 1625, Timor); it is mentioned as "*Python amethystinus*, Timor" in an undated list of

specimens presented to the Paris Museum in Schlegel's time. The specimen from New Ireland is also in the Paris Museum.

5. In the translation of Schlegel's *Essai* by Traill (Schlegel, 1843) two references to this form of snake occur. On p. 176 under *Python amethystinus* it is stated: "The islands of Timor, Samao, and New Ireland produce a Python almost absolutely similar, except that the characters are less marked", and on p. 235: "The Python of Timor is perhaps different from that of Amboina."

6. In his account of a visit to the Wienoto plain in the interior of Timor, Müller (1844 : 211) briefly described this python, and in a note (p. 221, note §) he introduces the name *Python timorensis*, adding that in his *Essai* Schlegel (1837, ii : 420) regarded this form as only a variety of *Python amethystinus*. Müller (1846 : 126) mentions *Python timorensis* as occurring in Timor. In the second edition of his account of his travels in Timor, the brief description is repeated, but the name of the species has been changed into *Python timoriensis* (Müller, 1857 : 172); the note referring to Schlegel's variety does not occur in this second edition.

7. After 1857, the name *Python timoriensis* for the species described by Müller in 1844 is mentioned as a synonym of *Liasis mackloti* Duméril & Bibron, 1844, by Jan (1863 : 26; 1865 : 98, 99), who ascribes the name to Schlegel. Both names, *Python timorensis* and *Python timoriensis* have been mentioned by me in a discussion of the history of the name and as a synonym of *Liasis mackloti mackloti* Duméril & Bibron (Brongersma, 1956 : 290-291).

8. Müller (1844 : 211) does not mention how many specimens he examined when he drew up the diagnosis of *Python timorensis*. In my previous note I accepted RMNH 1232, from Timor, as being the single type specimen of the species (Brongersma, 1956 : 292). Reconsidering the matter I now arrive at the conclusion that *Python timorensis* Müller was based upon syntypes. For this change of mind the following reason may be given. In a manuscript note on *Python timoriensis*, Müller gives the counts of ventrals and subcaudals for three specimens and he mentions Timor and Samao as localities. Probably this note was made after the fourth specimen had been sent already to the Paris Museum. Müller's (1844 : 211, note §) statement that his *P. timorensis* is the same as Schlegel's variety of *P. amethystinus*, makes it necessary to accept the specimens mentioned by Schlegel (1837, ii : 420) from Timor and Samao, and the one collected in New Ireland by Lesson for the Paris Museum, all to be syntypes of *P. timorensis* Müller. If one wants to exclude the Samao and New Ireland specimens from the syntypes, because no reference to these localities is made by Müller, one still has to deal with two specimens from Timor (RMNH 2132; MNHN 1625). It may well be that the specimen in the Paris Museum was not actually before Müller when he drew up the description, but having collected it himself and its having been included in Schlegel's variety, he had knowledge of it. However this may be, to avoid further difficulties, the only way out is to designate a lectotype of *Python timorensis* Müller, 1844, and as such I select the specimen from Timor, RMNH 1232, the scale counts of which were given in my previous note, and of which I also gave two figures (Brongersma, 1956: table 1, figs. 1e, 3c).

9. Apparently unaware that the species had been named already by Müller,

Duméril & Bibron (1844 : 440) described it once again and they named it *Liasis mackloti*. They refer to Schlegel's variety of *Python amethystinus*, stating (p. 442) that the specimen from New Ireland brought home by Lesson does not belong to this species. They add that the species had been discovered by Müller and Macklot in the islands of Timor and Samao (p. 442). Although Duméril & Bibron indicate that they had only one specimen before them, the reference to Schlegel, and the statement that the species occurs in Timor and Samao, points to all four specimens collected by Müller and Macklot being syntypes. Again this may be debatable, and while some may consider the specimen in the Paris Museum (MNHN 1625) to be the holotype, others may support the point of view that there are four syntypes. Therefore, I designate MNHN 1625 to be the lectotype of *Liasis mackloti* Duméril & Bibron. Prof. J. Guibé, Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, informs me that the specimen is from Timor.

10. As the lectotypes of both *Python timorensis* Müller and *Liasis mackloti* Duméril & Bibron are from Timor, this also restricts the type locality of both species to Timor. The dates of publication of the various parts of Müller's account of his travels have been established by Husson & Holthuis (1955); part 7 (pp. 193–224), containing the description of *Python timorensis* Müller, was published on January 30th 1844 (Husson & Holthuis, 1955 : 24).

11. The "Avant-Propos" of the sixth volume of Duméril & Bibron's *Erpétologie générale* is dated November 10th, 1844, and the volume must have been published after this date. Thus, *Python timorensis* Müller has priority over *Liasis mackloti* Duméril & Bibron, and if the law of priority were to be applied strictly we would have to use the specific name *timorensis* combined with the generic name *Liasis* for a species which has for more than a century been known as *Liasis mackloti* (many references given in the synonymy of *Liasis mackloti mackloti*; Brongersma, 1956 : 291–292). However, by applying the statute of limitation (Art. 23(b) of the Code), not having been used for the species concerned for more than fifty years, the name *timorensis* Müller, 1844, must be considered a *nomen oblitum* and it need not be revived. There is nothing to show that *timorensis* Müller, 1844, is an incorrect spelling, which would warrant its change into *timoriensis* by Müller, 1857, nor is there any indication that the change into *timoriensis* was an intentional emendation. It may therefore be considered that *timoriensis* Müller, 1857, has no status in nomenclature (Art. 33(b)).

12. However, to avoid any difficulties over these names in future, it is suggested that the best way out is to suppress both *Python timorensis* Müller, 1844, and *Python timoriensis* Müller, 1857, and all use of these names after these dates for the species generally known as *Liasis mackloti* Duméril & Bibron.

Python timoriensis (Peters, 1876)

13. Peters (1876 : 533) mentions a snake from Timor, which he believes to represent a variety of *Liasis amethystinus* (i.e., *Liasis amethistinus*). In fig. 3 of the plate accompanying Peters' article this snake is named var. *timoriensis*. Hubrecht (1879 : 16) examined a snake from Flores, which he considered conspecific with Peters' specimen from Timor. He points out that it is not a

variety of *Liasis amethystinus*. Rejecting the variety, Hubrecht also rejected the name used for it by Peters, and he described the Flores snake as a new species, which he named *Liasis petersii* (holotype: RMNH 517, type locality: Larantuka, Flores).

14. Boulenger (1893 : 85) accepted Hubrecht's opinion as to the specific status of this form, but he transferred it to the genus *Python*. Moreover, he changed the specific name from *timoriensis* into *timorensis*. A number of subsequent authors have used *Python timorensis*, and others have used *Python timoriensis* (references in: Brongersma, 1956 : 298). According to the Rules as they were in the past *Python timoriensis* (Peters, 1876) would be considered a homonym of *Python timorensis* Müller, 1857, and *Python timorensis* Boulenger, 1893, would be a homonym of *Python timorensis* Müller, 1844. Both Peters' and Boulenger's names would have to be rejected under the old Rules. The Code as it is at present (Art. 59 (e)) opens the possibility of revalidating a name when the species are referred to different genera. As Müller's species has been transferred from *Python* to *Liasis*, and Peters' from *Liasis* to *Python* one could use *timorensis* or *timoriensis* for a species in each of the genera *Liasis* and *Python*. However, I believe this would be unwise. Most references to these species do occur in zoogeographical publications, and I have no doubt that using *timorensis* or *timoriensis* in both genera (or even *timorensis* in the one genus and *timoriensis* in the other), especially when taking into account the past use of these names, confusion will be the result. This may be an additional argument to suppress all use of *timorensis* and *timoriensis* for the species generally known as *Liasis mackloti* Duméril & Bibron, 1844.

15. The Commission is therefore asked:

- (1) to use its plenary powers to suppress the specific name *timorensis* Müller, 1844, as published in the binomen *Python timorensis*, for the purposes of the Law of Priority, but not for those of the Law of Homonymy;
- (2) to place the following specific names on the Official Index of Rejected and Invalid Specific Names in Zoology:
 - (a) *timorensis* Müller, 1844, as published in the binomen *Python timorensis* (as suppressed under the plenary powers in (1) above);
 - (b) *timoriensis* Müller, 1857, as published in the binomen *Python timoriensis* (an incorrect spelling for *timorensis*, *Python*, Müller, 1844);
- (3) to place the following specific names on the Official List of Specific Names in Zoology:
 - (a) *timoriensis* Peters, 1876, as published in the binomen *Liasis timoriensis*;
 - (b) *mackloti* Duméril & Bibron, 1844, as published in the binomen *Liasis mackloti*.

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